

DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH

Pro-Europeans shouldn't wait for the Government...

The Swedish "Nej" vote will send Pro-Europeans into a mood as bleak as a Scandinavian winter. Coming after the resignation of the Director of the pro-euro Britain in Europe campaign and a summer dominated by David Kelly rather than the roadshows that Blair and Brown promised would build a "deep-seated European consensus", it kills off the last hopes of a vote on British membership this side of the general election. But the fact is that the Yes campaign in Sweden floundered because it shared the same flaws that have dogged the British pro-European cause over the last five years.

Firstly, the Swedish government waited until the beginning of the campaign to start making the arguments. Achieving the biggest turnaround in British public opinion since the war – 71% are currently opposed according to ICM – will be equally impossible within the six-week span of a referendum campaign.

Secondly, the Yes camp relied almost wholly on economic arguments. However, the economic case will always seem finely balanced because whatever the balance of expert opinion, broadcasting rules means that for every grey suit arguing for entry, another will be found warning about the dangers of a loss of economic control. The Yes camp would have been more effective if they argued that the only way for Sweden to retain control of its economy was through the Euro: the stark image of an empty chair representing Sweden in Europe might have been more persuasive than the posters emblazoned with a simple "Ja".

Thirdly, the Government allowed itself to be manoeuvred into standing *for* the establishment – and *against* the ordinary people. This shows the importance for British pro-Europeans of developing some establishment enemies to demonstrate that some of the most vocal eurosceptics are the richest businessmen in the land – from Stanley Kalms of Dixons to Tim Martin of Weatherspoons. Reminding the electorate that these people are not necessarily heroic defenders of the public interest should be a priority. So too, should be a reminder of the past arrogance and incompetence of leading members of the No campaign. After ten years the electorate might have forgotten that Norman Lamont's last major political initiative was Black Wednesday.

There is a widespread consensus amongst pollsters that public opinion could be turned round with a more effective campaign. But ultimately nothing will change until pro-Europeans stop being so cautious and moderate. To make progress Pro-Europeans must start to change the calculus of risk - both for the political class and the public. The Government need to know that they will pay a political price for staying out. At the moment they face a choice between a ferocious mauling from the tabloids or the genteel irritation of the Yes camp. It's no surprise that they take the line of least resistance every time. If business started to come out and attack Gordon Brown's record as chancellor and his myopia on Europe, if Pro-European MPs made it clear that they will not vote for a leadership candidate that has thwarted Britain's chances of

joining, and if cabinet ministers threatened to quit over the issue with the same passion as their opponents - then it would not be so easy to bow to the Sun.

Two weeks ago, the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw delivered an eloquent and devastating attack on Conservative European Policy in a lecture to The Foreign Policy Centre. However, when questioned about the euro, he hid limply behind the five economic tests. This is an eloquent sign that the Pro-European campaign needs to distance itself from the Government and trade its genteel persuasion for the low cunning and guerrilla tactics used to such corrosive effect by the sceptics.

Britain in Europe has often seemed like an annex of the Downing Street Press Office – wanting to avoid embarrassing the government because of their – correct and legitimate - belief that Tony Blair was the campaign's greatest asset. This means that they've failed to bring home uncomfortable truths about manufacturing companies relocating and the haemorrhaging of political influence in Europe. Ministers are never going to argue that the economy is getting worse under their stewardship or that they are failing to get their way in Europe, particularly in the run-up to an election.

Neil Kinnock rightly blamed the “nej” vote on the Swedish failure to publicise the falling inward investment figures. If the British electorate knew that foreign investment has been in free-fall since our decision to remain outside – down from 28.3% in 1998 to 5.1% last year then the status quo might not seem any longer the safe option. Pro-Europeans should make a fuss every time anyone invests in the euro-zone to remind people of the investment that would be coming our way if we joined. Equally, footage of the Chancellor making his early exit from meetings of European Finance Ministers should become a powerful symbol of our lost political influence. This should be accompanied with aggressive attacks when we lose out in negotiations over the Common Agricultural Policy, European Defence or the European Constitution – showing that we would win the arguments if we were in the euro.

Above all the Yes camp needs to shake itself out of self-pity and despair. They need to start behaving like the serious constituency that they are – representing a majority of the Cabinet, hundreds of Labour MPs, the most impressive Conservative politicians, the entire Liberal Democratic Party, most foreign policy and economic decision-makers, and large segments of the media. It is time to start for this extraordinary array of political and economic power to make the political weather – rather than allowing itself to be consistently out-gunned by a few maverick eccentrics. If the Government remain unwilling to invest real effort in changing the political climate, pro-Europeans must force the issue onto the political agenda, rather than console themselves with another collective sigh of resignation.

Mark Leonard is Director of The Foreign Policy Centre (www.fpc.org.uk).